

I try to make the ceremony of my oath of office inspiring for my constituents who come to Washington that day and for myself. On January 4 I was joined by several eloquent speakers, including Anthony Appiah, a philosopher at Princeton University, who shared his thoughts on bridging party lines in these divisive times:

“Ben Franklin, one of the wisest of our founding spirits, told in his autobiography about how we can deal rationally but also humanely with the problems of political division.

“Franklin tells how he got the help of a legislator who disagreed with him on policy, not by being nice to him—that was too obvious—but by asking him to lend him a book. From then on they were friends.

“‘He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another,’ Franklin wrote, ‘than he whom you yourself have obliged.’

“So I think that one thing we could all do is ask a few kindnesses from Republicans, if we’re Democrats, and from Democrats, if we’re Republicans, and see if we can’t do more to get along. President Obama did just that when he asked Jim Leach, a retired Republican congressman, to head up the National Endowment for the Humanities. And Chris Christie, our governor, did it when he asked President Obama for help after Hurricane Sandy.

“In a democracy we’re all dependent on each other, because we need the good sense of our fellow voters to get us good legislators. Recognizing that we need one another, and that there’s more to be gained by admitting that than there is by badmouthing each other, would be a fine application of Ben Franklin’s humane lesson. And it would also be scientific, too. Because social psychologists have a name for what happens when someone you ask for a favor comes to like you: it’s called the Ben Franklin Effect.”

Sixty-Four Firefighters

Last week, the Trenton Fire Department formally announced that it has received a \$14.9 million grant that will enable it to retain 55 firefighters and hire nine new firefighters.

Trenton is blessed to have men and women who are willing to serve in this hazardous, critical public service. I worked with a task force of Trenton officials to write letters and make phone calls to FEMA to secure these funds.

This grant was made possible through the federal government's Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program. Yes, the federal government can contribute to making our towns safer and our lives better.

More of the Same

President Obama announced last Monday that he would nominate John Brennan, his current top counterterrorism advisor, to head the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). After his decades in the CIA, perhaps Mr. Brennan's key counterterrorism legacy will be the expanded use of armed military drones in special operation killings. For the past four years, President Obama has continued many of the Bush Administration's policies on intelligence. His nomination of Mr. Brennan is emblematic of the CIA's becoming more a military organization than an organization for collecting and analyzing intelligence.

Sincerely,

Rush Holt
Member of Congress